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Unit Plan Rationale

Throughout my experience as a future educator in the English of Education Department at Wichita State, I can summarize my beliefs in how to provide instruction in this quote, “In learning complex new knowledge, a person benefits from an extended process of using concepts and tools across a variety of contexts” (Smagorinsky 19). The concept that learning must be scaffolded throughout a variety of teaching methods and tested in such a way that must be beneficial to the specific class that a teacher has is best practiced when the teacher is knowledgeable of the student’s academically, behaviorally, and on a somewhat personal level.

The skills it takes to obtain literacy within the classroom are also vital to incorporate, in every content area, but especially in the English and Language Arts classroom. Teaching literacy means that I will demonstrate to my students how to use context clues, how to identify key words, how to determine the “bigger picture”, encourage higher level thinking/ questions, and how to identify suffix/prefix meanings of words, just to name a few of the many. An example of how I am practicing this through my unit plan is the use of a Reader’s Notebook and the Vocabulary Notebook. The Reader’s Notebook encourages students to look at the novel in an analytical aspect and demonstrate the ability to formulate those thoughts through their written responses. I have created it based on the concepts in the Smagorinsky text (85). It is noted that “The purpose of such journals is to encourage students to attend carefully to the language of the literature and to read reflectively,” (Smagorinsky 85-86). The Vocabulary Notebook gives the students background knowledge on words that they most likely had no knowledge of beforehand, expand their vocabulary, as well as allow for a smoother reading of the text thus grasping the concepts with more efficiency. The ability to read in a way that is most beneficial is to have knowledge of vocabulary that is in the text itself. The struggle of vocabulary acquisition is one that I’m hoping to overcome through daily bell work and vocabulary quizzes.

My choice of subject incorporates the interdisciplinary subject of social studies to allow students to take a step further in viewing past and current world events in the Language Arts classroom so that they not only look at it in a historical perspective but also in a way that allows them to identify important concepts and first character perspective of real people that have experienced what they read in their textbooks. In an ideal school I would collaborate with the Social Studies teacher so that students could see the connections between both subjects. The connections of the patterns within the subject areas and the ability to translate it to students in a form that they understand and retain are the goals of the teaching experience for me. Not only do students understand the concepts in the moment but an effective teacher can plant the seed in a students’ mind and have it grow by the solid foundation given to them.

Invention of writing should be not only an individual act, but a social act as well. This is why I have chosen to use the Reader’s Notebook as a way to begin discussions, allow students to reflect on their thoughts with tangible notes, and the use of Literature Circles. Peer review on writing will also be a focus in my classroom. Feedback is essential and there are multiple tools both inside and outside of the classroom that have the ability to provide the opportunity for feedback, whether it be electronically, verbally, or written. Although I do not display the usage of technology within this unit plan, in my classroom I would like to do a combination of the three. As technology progresses it becomes more necessary to be able to collaborate and effectively write electronically in the majority of the job field. Students will need practice collaborating with their classmates in preparation for the future tasks and acquire the ability to do so effectively.

As for the writing assignments, there will be multiple ones throughout my unit. A creative writing assignment is included to allow students to apply their own perspective on what they are reading and assist me in seeing what major themes they are grasping from the text. The concept of “imitating without plagiarizing” is an appealing skill that is introduced in the text *Image Grammar* (Noden 79). I would like to teach my students how to create a piece of work that imitates an author’s style without plagiarizing the work. Through the study of a poem I would like to introduce this concept in steps that a broken down through the use of the TPCASTT method (Huff). With the analysis of the title, the paraphrasing, the necessity to give insight on the connotations of the words used, and a educated insight on the overall theme, allows the students to see the style of the writer and possibly warm up to the idea of imitating the style.

Throughout my teacher education, I have been given the opportunity to experience teaching at the high school level as well as the high school level. My cooperating teachers have allowed me to look at the district guide to get a glimpse at what I will be expected to do when I begin teaching. There are many different objectives, expectations, and standards that I see are universal in the different concepts in literature. I’ve seen that it is important to recognize themes in literature and assists students in comprehending the essential questions in a given unit. Each story has universal themes and to relate it back to the lives of the students is one of the most useful strategies because they are more likely to remember and become interested.

The use of multiple strategies, I’ve learned, provide the optimal experience. Other concepts I would like to use in my classroom would be anticipatory activities. There is a justification of background knowledge that Juan Phillips uses to connect the past to present learning so that students have a solid foundation of their learning material (Fisher & Frey 24). Not only is it a good idea to make the lesson intriguing but the layering of knowledge is just as important for the students’ long-term retention of the material. One of the anticipatory activities I have planned in my own unit plan is the book talk. Due to my own experience in having it exemplified for me, I believe that it is a useful tool in engaging students as well as sparking their interest prior to reading a novel.

My observation based on my experience is that there are many middle and high school students who still have yet to develop effective note-taking strategies. Many students just waited to get the answers from the teacher versus searching on their own. Regardless if I teach the middle school or high school level I will give students guided instructions on how to take notes in both of their notebooks. I would give them a participation grade because it would be solely for their benefit and not a use of control. The grammar chart is an excellent example for diagramming a story for its setting, rising action, conflict, climax, falling action, resolution, and theme (Fisher & Frey 110). This would be something that I would have the students do towards the end of the novel in their Reader’s Notebook, so that we can reflect on the different parts of the story and how we identify, break down, and construct meaning through this strategy.

I’m excited to try out different strategies that I’ve learned throughout my teaching career. The classroom benefits from a variety of strategies and the integration of multiple intelligences. It’s my goal to try to create a learning environment has the best possible results in the retention of literacy and writing skills for all of my students so that they will be able to layer the knowledge I have given them and carry it over to other subject areas. Literacy, reading, and writing are vital components in not only my own subject, English, but to the various different spectrums across all subject areas. We all have one common goal and that is to create a better tomorrow through the power of knowledge and understanding.

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